

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE

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FOL USUN NEW YORK 3485 SENT ACTION SECSTATE SEPT 7, 1978

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PORG, UNSC, SF, WA

SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: REASONS FOR BOTHA'S RETURN

1. AMBASSADOR MCHENRY AND AMBASSADOR RICHARD CALLED UPON FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE WEDNESDAY EVENING. BOTHA ASKED ALL OF HIS AIDES EXCEPT FOURIE TO LEAVE THE ROOM, AND THE FOUR THEN ENGAGED IN A DISCUSSION WHICH LASTED APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR AND 15 MINUTES. BOTHA'S MOOD WAS EXTREMELY RELAXED.

2. AMBASSADOR RICHARD EXPLAINED TO BOTHA THAT IT WOULD
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NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA TO RESERVE ITS POSITION AFTER SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION ON THE SYG'S REPORT, AS HAD OCCURRED IN THE FIRST ACTION OF THE COUNCIL ON NAMIBIA. TO DO SO WOULD RISK A SITUATION IN WHICH THE COUNCIL APPROVED ACTIONS ONLY TO FACE SOUTH AFRICAN REJECTIONS. THIS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE FOLLOWED BY A SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING WHICH CALLED FOR SANCTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA FOR ITS

FAILURE TO ABIDE BY THE COUNCIL'S DECISIONS. IT WAS THEREFORE IMPERATIVE FOR BOTHA TO PROVIDE THE FIVE WITH AN INDICATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S POSITION ON THE ELEMENTS OUTLINED EARLIER TO FOURIE BY THE FIVE. WE UNDERTOOK TO PROVIDE BOTHA WITH AS MUCH SPECIFICITY AS POSSIBLE BEFORE THE PROJECTED MEETING WITH VORSTER ON SATURDAY. IN THE CONVERSATION WHICH FOLLOWED BOTHA ADVANCED THREE REASONS FOR HIS DECISION TO RETURN: RHODESIA WAS IN A PERILOUS STATE AND THERE WERE ACTIONS BY ITS INTERIOR MINISTERS AND CALLS BY SOUTH AFRICANS WHICH WOULD DANGEROUSLY EXACERBATE THE SITUATION; NAMIBIA WAS EXTREMELY FRAGILE AND HE COULD NOT ALLOW A SITUATION IN WHICH OBVIOUS OPPONENTS OF THE PROPOSAL WERE FREE TO WORK AGAINST HIM WITHOUT FEAR OF REFUTATION; AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S HEALTH WAS MOST UNCERTAIN, MAKING IT POLITICALLY UNWISE FOR HIM TO BE AWAY DURING THE MANEUVERING FOR A NEW PRIME MINISTER.

3. IN ELABORATING ON VORSTER'S HEALTH AND THE BATTLE FOR SUCCESSION, BOTHA MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE SKIRMISHES HAD ALREADY BEGUN. HE HAD TALKED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING HIS STAY IN NEW YORK, BUT HAD BEEN UNABLE TO GET A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S HEALTH. BOTHA WAS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD INDICATED HIS DESIRE TO MEET WITH THE CABINET FOR AN HOUR ON TUESDAY. IT WOULD NOT SEEM TO BE A ROUTINE CABINET MEETING. HIS FEAR WAS THAT THE PRIME

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MINISTER WOULD ANNOUNCE HIS RESIGNATION AND THAT THE PARTY WOULD HAVE BETWEEN THEN AND THE 29TH OF SEPTEMBER, WHEN THE PARTY CAUCUS IS SCHEDULED, TO MEET TO AGREE UPON A NEW PRIME MINISTER.

4. BOTHA MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE IS CONCERNED THAT THE NAMIBIA QUESTION MAY BECOME A POLITICAL FOOTBALL IN THE RACE FOR SUCCESSION.

5. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, BOTHA PROFESSED THAT HE HAD NO AMBITION FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S POST. AS A PRACTICAL MATTER HE SAID HE HAD SUPPORT WITHIN THE COUNTRY, BUT INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT WITHIN THE PARTY.

6. BOTHA CLOSED BY ASKING US TO PROVIDE HIM WITH AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE SO THAT HE CAN MAKE A PERSUASIVE CASE TO HIS CABINET. YOUNG UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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